

Addressing Youth Climate Anxiety with City Climate Action Plans

By Krish Arora



Last winter, my middle-school cousin sent me these photos as her family evacuated their Los Angeles area home, wildfires raging nearby. Her experiences mirror what I felt watching the orange skies in 2020, when over 4 million acres burned across the SF Bay Area.

According to *The Lancet*, 84 percent of young people ages 16 to 25 are worried about climate change, with 59 percent extremely worried. Children and young adults will disproportionately suffer the consequences of environmental changes and are simultaneously more vulnerable to the effects of chronic stress. Climate anxiety has become an emerging health crisis, yet there have been inadequate efforts to reduce it.

Progress has been made, especially in Santa Clara. The California Air Emissions Board data shows a 33 percent decrease in vehicle emissions per capita in the county since 2000. Fifty-four out of 58 California counties have seen a per capita decrease. California has decreased its emissions per capita by 20 percent while doubling its GDP per capita, increasing living standards for its residents, while also helping our climate.

Yet Google Trends data for California shows that searches for “climate anxiety” and “climate disaster” dwarf searches for “climate progress.” While California has made tremendous progress reducing emissions, our youth have no idea. Whether it’s news sources embellishing disasters or ignoring progress, young people are drowning in negativity while remarkable achievements go

unnoticed.

Cupertino's Climate Action Plan has extensive emission reduction strategies, but lacks a framework for addressing climate anxiety. This pattern repeats across Bay Area cities. We need to change this.

The American Psychological Association has identified that "there is still a big need to create additional actionable programs that address climate anxiety and are tailored to young people." Yet California's environmental initiatives focus primarily on emissions reduction rather than the psychological support systems its youth desperately need.

What can the city do? First, acknowledge climate anxiety in their Climate Action Plan as a real health concern, validating young people's experiences while signaling a commitment to solutions. Second, share regular data-driven progress updates through their website and other means to balance the narrative.

The data proves we are making significant environmental progress. The Google Trends analysis proves young people aren't aware. This communication failure creates a generation paralyzed by climate despair that should be empowered through climate optimism.

Santa Clara's 33 percent reduction in per capita emissions is a real victory. There is still plenty of work to be done. But as we push forward into creating a net-zero future, let's not forget to ensure we are all conscious of our progress.